The Inimitable Sage

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शारदा पुस्तकालय
(संस्थापना ...)
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— G.N. RAINA

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The Inimitable Sage

"Your Guru has directed me to grace you"- these words were uttered by no less a spiritual luminary than Shri Satya Sai Baba of Puttaparti to a close devotee of Bhagawaan Gopinath Ji when he approached the sage in Bombay at the behest of his son-in-law to seek Grace for overcoming his bodily ailment. The Baba moved his right hand, and poured some holy ash to be taken orally and

lo and behold, the devotee instantaneously got rid of his physical pain. The Baba, then, continued saying, "Your Guru was the greatest Kashmiri saint; he was *Jiwan Mukta* in the real sense. He will appear before you in about two months". This was in December 1973, nearly six years after the Bhagawaan had left his mortal coil.

Bhagawaan Gopinath Ji did keep his date and he appeared to the said devotee twice in the subsequent two months (Jan-Feb 1974).

An embodiment of compassion for all those who sought his grace, Bhagawaan GopinathJi has been and continues to be an unfailing source of solace to their afflicted souls. Men and women, young and old, the educated and the unlettered, the agnostics and the believers, would visit him, in and out of season, to receive words of comfort which would still the throbbing pain of their hearts.

Kashmir has produced a galaxy of saints and sages from times immemorial, and in

recent past we have had a number of them. But few among the contemporaries have left as indelible an impression on the minds of the people as Bhagawaan Gopinath Ji. Two highly venerated mystics of contemporary Kashmir -- Kashkak and Nanda Bab, recognised Bhagawaanji's greatness. While Swami Kashkak is on record as saying that Bhagawaanji has been the recipient of special grace of *Mother Sharika,* Swami Nandlalji described Bhagawaan as "the king of

saints in Kashmir''.

Bhagawaan Gopinath Ji led a simple, austere life. He never moved out of Kashmir; in fact, he shunned publicity, and covered himself with anonymity. Sadhus and saints from outside Kashmir did visit him. A celibate, he lived with his near relations all his life. Though he read upto middle standard only, yet he displayed a fair knowledge of Sanskrit, Persian, Urdu and English. He spoke very little, never preached, puffed *Chillum* constantly and always remained engrossed in *Brahman*, so much so a casual

visitor would remain unnoticed by him for hours together.

A Siddha, having attained the olympic heights of spirituality, Bhagawaan Gopinath Ji was an enigmatic God-man. His life was a curious blend of *Jnana* (knowledge), *Bhakhti*(devotion) and *Karma* (action). For most of us who had had the good fortune of his *darshan* in flesh and blood, he was the holiest of the holy, with a healing touch and wielding *Ashta Sidhis* for the good of the people and the nation. To some others, his bizarre behaviour presented a

picture of his inscrutability. His marijuana smoking, his non-vegetarianism and unorthodox ways were an enigma to the uninitiated. Ordinary mortals like us could hardly fathom his *'Gunateet'* and *'Mayateet'* nature.

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Born in a respected Bhan family of Kashmiri Pandits in Srinagar on 3rd of July, 1898, Bhagawaan Gopinath Ji almost inherited spiritual fervour from his highly religious minded father and mother. His

mother was born to her parents following the grant of a boon by Goddess Rajnya herself. Bhagawaan Gopinath Ji had two brothers and two sisters. While the elder brother was a bachelor, the one younger to him did marry but remained issueless. The two sisters unfortunately lost their husbands early, the elder one after bearing two daughters and the younger one after bearing two sons and two daughters. Bhagawaanji was looked after by his elder sister and her two daughters.

From the days of infancy,

Bhagawaan Gopinath Ji, showed little interest in things material. He would sing the glories of God, of *Mother Sharika* and seize whatever opportunity he could get to attend *bhajan mandalis* and *raslilas.* The spirit of renunciation and the other- worldliness had overtaken his sensitive young mind. That is why his schooling was not complete and he did not take seriously to his uncle's Pashmina business either. He did take up the job of a compositer in the city's oldest press-Vishnath Press, but gave it up only after three years,

during which period the press is said to have flourished. Bhagawaan ji rejected the entreaties of the proprietor of the Press saying that his "*Dassdaraz*" with him had ended. Later, he started a grocer's shop which he gave up soon after to plunge headlong into a rigorous *tapasya*.

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From the age of 20, he had begun daily Parikrama of *Hari Parbat* and would spend hours in Devi Angan absorbed

in the meditation of the Divine Mother. Of course, *Chillum* was his constant companion, even in those days. This period of his *Sadhana* was marked by devotion to the *Shakti* aspect of Godhead. He used to recite from memory hymns like *Panchastavi, Bhawani Sahasranama, Saundaryalahri Vishnu Sahasranam, Mahimna Stotra, Utpalastotravali, Guru Gita* and *Bhagwadgita.*

Not much is known about who initiated him. The well-known biographer of Bhagawaan ji, Shri S.N.Fotedar has tried to lay his hand on all

evidences in this regard but has not been able to establish who his Guru was. Here, we would like to accept what Bhagawaan ji himself hinted at, obliquely though. On being asked, only a few years before his *Nirvana,* as to who his Guru was, he replied'' any one of the 700 Shlokas of Gitaji can be one's Guru''.

The second and the most important phase of his quest for self realization began when he was 32. For the next seven years, i.e. upto the age of 39, he wrestled with God, so to say. In this period of intense

tapasya, he would lie on a bed, face towards the wall, with a lamp burning in his room which would often be covered with layers of dust. It is said that a rat made a hole in one of his heels which took a long time to heal. He had almost lost all consciousness of his body. He would often take *Datura* seed, opium and other intoxicants and would, at times vomit blood.

While it is difficult, nay impossible, to assess the state of Bhagawaan ji's spiritual advancement during this period, we have a clue given

again by Bhagawaan ji himself in a cryptic reply he gave to his elder sister when she tried to pursuade him to take to wordly life in view of the financial difficulties the family was in. He told her, ``Sister, our boat is in the midst of an ocean. Either we will reach the shore safely or get drowned''.

To our great good luck, Bhagawaan Gopinath Ji did swim to the shore and out of the great ordeal of seven long years emerged a Siddha, with of course, a mauled body but a radiant spirit, with full vision of past, present and future. He

had realized his true self and become one with *Siva,* the Ultimate Truth.

The truths of spirit can be apprehended only by those who like Bhagawaanji prepare themselves for their reception by rigorous discipline. It was not for nothing that in later years, he would often tell his close devotees that *''MEHNAT PANANYA BIYI GURU KRIPA''*, meaning that intense personal effort and the grace of Guru are the essential pre-requisites of God realization.

Devotees like Prof. K.N.Dhar feel that Bhagawaanji inclined

towardstheTantricmethodof *Sadhana.* According to him, "Bhagawan Gopinath Ji opted for the more strenuous path of Tantras with its curves and bends and wove the threads of his life on this texture". This body, says *Rudrayamala Tantra,* is an oblation which is to be continuoulsy offered to the fire of self scrutiny. The unextinguishing *Dhooni* in front of Bhagawaanji since the end of the seven-year spiritual odyssey symbolized this truth.

After realizing the dynamic aspect of Reality, i.e., the Divine Mother, Bhagawaanji

took to the worship of *Siva*, the pure consciousness aspect of Truth. *Siva* is Infinite Consciousness, the subject as well as the object. *Siva* and *Sakti* are one indivisible whole. While *Siva* is the changeless reality underlying the entire universe, his energy, *Shakti*, has an infinity of aspects - *Chit* (intellect), *Ananda*(bliss), *Ichha*(Will), *Jnana* (knowledge) and *Kriya* (creative work). The recognition (*Pratyabijna*) of reality, according to Kashmiri Saivist thought, is all that is needed for *Moksha*. That is

why Bhagawaan Gopinath Ji was recognized as *Jeewan Mukta* (a liberated soul).

Again, Siva and Shakti, in the Ultimate analysis, constitute the contours of a common rather than a specific gender. The male *(Nar)* and the female *(Nari)* aspects of Reality are fused together in the case of Tantrik mystics who have often been observed to give feminine names to males and vice versa. One of the foremost Tantrik mystics of Kashmir, Swami Anandji of Jamnagari often addressed his male disciples as females,

perhaps to demonstrate that gender had lost all meaning for him and the likes of him. The great sage-poetess of yore, Lal Ded, looked upon all males as females.

An important aspect of Bhagawaan Gopinath Ji's spiritual *Sadhana* was emission of well-controlled rhythmic vibrations from various parts of his body. *Spanda Shastra* of Kashmir Saivism speaks of the vibratory nature of ultimate reality. In the last 30 years of his earthly existence, Bhagawaan ji would keep talking to invisible forces while he would

be smoking his *Chillum.* At times, he would not even respond to people around him. None dared disturb him while puffing his *Chillum* with his eyes turned skyward, emitting and receiving vibrations. Always immersed in Samadhi, he would come down to our plane of consciousness when his attention was drawn, speak a few words and then go back to the same state. It was quite apparent that *Chillum* symbolized the vehicle of his communion with the Divine. The inhaling of the smoke

acted as an aid for supra-mental dialogue with the Ultimate Truth. In such planes of mystic exhilaration, natural propensities of human organs are said to reverse the roles, where the eyes can speak, the ears can see and the mouth can feel. The senses are said to be under complete control and the mystic utilises them the way he thinks is the best. This stage is known as *DIVYA SHAKTI.*

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"There is neither East nor West for the naked soul. The whold world is its home and as its home is in each of us, it belongs to all of us''. These words of the French Savant, Romain Rolland, are true of all great saints, savants and sages, Bhagawaan Gopinath Ji belongs to the entire world. There was no Hindu, Mussalman or Christian for him. All religions and all faiths led to the same goal. He once told a close devotee of his.'' Think of Brahman as a Tree and sit on any one of its branches. All branches will lead you to the

same goal''. As *Isa Upanisad* puts it, this entire universe is enveloped by God, and nothing but God.

Bhagawaan Gopinath Ji laid stress on *Vichar,* rational thought and the ability to discriminate between the real and the unreal, and he would often say that "a Yogi may attain realization of God but it is only the *Vicharvan,* the discerning sage and the profound seer, who can fathom all aspects of the Brahman, the Ultimate Truth.'' He confirmed the faith of the devotees in whatever they

held dear and guided them according to their capacity. Though he suggested *Saakar Upasana* (worship of God with form) to the beginners, he would say *Yi Gav Taaph Parun* meaning that it was just like worshipping the effulgence and not the substance of the sun. On yet another occasion, he told a *Sakar Upasak* "you have light to the level of your throat but your body is blank".
He wanted his devotees to realize the absolute truth in all its aspects.

Bhagawaan Gopinath Ji advocated special efforts on

the part of a spiritual aspirant. He abhored lackadiasical form of *Upasana* which he thought was like moving under the shade of willow trees, *Yi Gav Veeri Shihilis Tal Pakun.* He wanted Truth Seekers to plunge into God realization with complete surrender.

He would often urge the devotees to lift the veil of ego that enveloped Atman. *AHANKAARAS NAMASKAAR - SUI GAV OMKAAR - TAMI SAATI BANI SAAKSHATKAAR,* which means, ``bid good-bye to Ego and be face to face with reality.''

Here, one would recall an incident when a saintly person was disuaded by a scholar-saint from visiting Bhăgawaan ji. saying "since when have you started bowing to lumps of muck?" And when the said gentleman went to see Bhagawaan ji, he was asked, "Why do you come to bow before lumps of muck? We are not chiselled scholars." A nice, subtle dig at the scholar-saint! How true! It is the meek, the humble, the unsophisiticated who shall be saved rather than those with inflated egos.

He never advised anyone to give up his houshold, wife or children in the quest of Truth. According to him, a worldly man, a Grihasta, could be a man of dispassion and reach the Ultimate. But he was quite adamant in not guiding those who could not practise celibacy, for he believed that the two centres of *Brahma Jnana* were located in the Cit(intellect) - one near and the other beyond the back of *Chidakasha* and that these centres were well preserved only by remaining celibate.

In our spiritual tradition, there

are two ways to attain Godhead-the one is known as the Buddha way where you tread the path alone, better known in scriptures as *tapasya* in which individual effort dominates, and the other is to cross the ocean of existence through the medium of a Guru who represents the Divine, who knows the path and is in a position to help others in finding it. The Guru seeks to awaken much more than to instruct, says the great Yogi, Aurobindo Ghosh in his famous work *Synthesis of Yoga.* And Bhagawaan Gopinath Ji him-

self said on one occasion, when a verse in Kashmiri extolling the virtues of a Guru was being sung, *YI GACHHI YACHHUN.* It is an indication of God's grace, if one surrenders at the feet of the Guru.

He did not deliver sermons. He initiated a devotee and induced *Parmarth* (spirituality) by a touch, a mere glance and by sharing his chillum. Each received his grace according to one's Karma.

Strange are the goings-on of mystics. We recognise their greatness on the basis of something they do which is not

explained by the ordinary laws of nature. And we describe these ways as mysterious. Saints and sages have been known to have a clear vision, with ability to read the thoughts of others, forecast events, prescribe remedies and clear impediments.

The saints, however are not to be judged by miracles alone, for some of them are really averse to demonstrations of this sort as they do not wish to interfere with nature. But, again, as Bhagawaan Raman Maharishi of Tiruvanamalai put it, ''it is

enough for the thoughts of a *Jnani* to be turned in any direction and the automatic divine activity begins''. As if to prove beyond doubt the efficacy of what Shri Raman Maharshi had said about miracles, Bhagawaan Gopinath Ji, during his *Amarnath Yatra,* addressed an overcast sky at *Wavjan* above the sacred *Sheshnag* lake, ''You settle down in *Sheshnag''* and in no time was the sky clear of the black clouds and the thousands of pilgrims resumed journey without fear of a bad weather.

Kind and compassionate as Bhagawaan Gopinath Ji was, he cured incurable diseases like blood cancer, and he would often ask those stricken with malignant diseases to be brought to him and a mere glance or touch would cure them completely, to the surprise of all. On request, he would give some ash from his *Dhooni* to cure ailments. Diabetes, Tuberculosis, brain haomorrhages and mental disorders were cured by him. He never asked for any money, though whatever was offered was accepted only to

be distributed among those present. Once he referred to these offerings (money, fruits, sweets etc) as blood. This is all blood, he would say. And, it is said, he took upon himself any evil attached to such offerings.

A mystic tradition has it that at a particular point of time, a Divine Government functions and oversees the workings of human mind. It also directs the world affairs. Bhagawaan Gopinath Ji was regarded the king of this Divine set up in the State. In this context, one can understand what happened in 1947 and 1948 in the

aftermath of a tribal raid conducted surreptituously by Pakistan into the territory of Jammu and Kashmir.

In 1947, in one of his soliloques, Bhagawaan ji was heard saying: ``What is our army doing? They get so much ration and yet do not open a direct route to Kashmir for Ladakhi Lamas.'' And in 1948, we witnessed Indian army conquering Zojilla Pass and Kargil, thus establishing a direct link with Ladakh. A Military Police Officer connected with this operation was informed by the Front

Commander that the operations were directed by a mysterious person, giving his identification clues. Long after that, the said Military Police Officer, a Christian, did visit Bhagawaanji in Srinagar through the courtesy of one Mr. T.N.Dhar and the officer confirmed that the saint exactly answered to the description given by the Front Commander.

This is not all, In September 1962, when he was at *Bhadrakali,* Bhagawaanji told his sister and Swami Amrit-ananda who accompanied

him, ''Don't you see what is happening across the mountains? A whiff of wind from that side will blow you over''. Rest is a matter of history. Again, before the 1965 war, he pointed towards south-west and said, *Kaala* (death) was dancing there. At the end of the hostilities, however, he pointed out that ''the west is clear now''.

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Bhagawaan Gopinath Ji used to sit on his *aasan* almost all the 24 hours absorbed in Higher Self. Every

morning he would wash his face and *Yajnopavit* at the water tap, tie his turban and put on saffron *tilak* with a touch of ash in the centre. And then he would start his *Dhooni.* He would rarely take bath. In fact in the last 30 years of his life, he took bath only twice, once at *Kshir Bhawani* and another at Chundapora residence in Srinagar when Dāl Lake was frozen. It is said that soon after he took bath, there was thaw and the cold wave abated. But even though he did not take bath, his skin usually gave out an aroma. In fact, he had

no body consciousness. He used to describe his legs as splinters of wood. He clean shaved his head once a month. The devotees used to massage his body but he would never take bath after the massage. He, however, stopped devotees from doing any massage a year before he left us. He would undertake fasts for months at a stretch. The fasts were not of the ceremonial type, that of missing a meal a day but these involved total abstention from food, except a cup of *Kahwa* on rare occasions.

In the last two years of his sojourn on the planet earth, he gave enough hints of his decision to give up his gross body. During this period, he did not leave his *aasan* even to answer the calls of nature. He would remark: ``I have now grown old''. To a devotee who showed concern at his failing health, he said about one and a half month before the fateful day: *Amar Chha Maraan* (Do the deathless die?) Again, a few months before his leaving the mortal frame, his biographer and a close devotee, Shri Fotedar, asked

him why swelling in his genitals persisted. He replied, "What else is going to happen to this body? It will get shattered piece by piece". Only a few days before his passing away, he remarked:" I should like to go to *Kshir Bhawani now*". He also said that *Dhooni* was no more necessary.

Almost on every Sunday, musicians sang till late in the night and he would never ask them to stop. But on his last Sunday on earth, 26th May, '68 he directed the musicians to stop, remarking "we shall not listen to any more music".

Then came May 28, 1968, Tuesday - the day Bhagawaan Gopinath Ji finally chose to cast off his *Bhautik Sareera.* He went through the morning routine as usual. At about 3 p.m. he directed one of his devotees to give the three *Sadhus* rupee one each. He had the last few puffs at his *Chillum.* A devotee started making tea but Bhagawaanji said "We shall not take tea any more". He asked for water at 5.30 p.m. And at 5.45 p.m. he uttered *OM NAMAH SHIVAYA* in a low voice, looked around with infinite love

towards those present, and closed his eyes. All was over. The revered Nanda Bab mourned the loss by saying that Kashmir had been rocked by an earthquake.

Thus, passed into eternity a great *Siddha.* He may be no more with us in flesh and blood. But his Spirit continues to guide the ever-increasing number of devotees scattered all over the world. His influence is being felt in even greater measure now.

Nearly a quarter of a century has elapsed since his *Nirvana.* Yet a mere look at his portrait

gives, to the man of faith, the feeling of the presence of a Living Reality. He seems to talk through his lustrous and penetrating eyes. His angelic countenance takes charge of one's afflicted heart, as it were and fills it with inexhaustible bliss. Many a devotee who had never seen him in his life-time, have testified to this mysterious experience.

In his Cosmic form, Bhagawaan Gopinath Ji has been seen to take care of all those who surrender to him, heart and soul. Not bound by the limitations of time and

space, Bhagawaanji has been munificent in answering sincere prayers anywhere any time. In the words of Swami Yogananda, the celebrated author of ''The Autobiography of a Yogi'', perfect Masters like Bhagawaan Gopinath Ji ''can materialize and dematerialize themselves and move with the velocity of light and utilise the creative light rays in bringing into instant visibility any physical manifestation''. According to him, a sage who has merged his consciousness with that of the Supreme Reality perceives the cosmic

essence as light and being free from the three dimensions of space and the fourth one of time, is able to transfer his physical or cosmic form with equal ease through the light rays of earth, water, fire and air.

We are passing through very critical times. Materialism has taken a firm hold over our minds, particularly the young. The moral and spiritual values are on the wane. The need to move from the outer to the inner life, to coordinate the scientific temper and the spiritual approach and to restore the efficacy of our

ancient ethical, cultural and spiritual perspectives, has never been greater than now. And in this task, only the saints like Bhagawaan Gopinath Ji can show us the right path, dispel fear in our minds and instil the much-needed faith and love. Bhagawaanji has a divine mission to fulfil. He will, we firmly believe, shed light and illumine the dark patches of our aggrieved souls.

Our salutations to this great sage who made Kashmir, nay the entire world, proud.

मूल्य – 5/–